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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 001516

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CA](#)
SUBJECT: CANADA SUSPENDING PARLIAMENT, AGAIN

REF: OTTAWA 1512 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced on December 4 that Governor General Michaëlle Jean had agreed to "prorogue" Parliament (a technical suspension) until January 26. (At the PM's request, the Governor General had similarly prorogued Parliament in September 2007, for one month.) The House of Commons will cease meeting immediately, but will reconvene on January 26, with the first order of business to be a new "Speech from the Throne" laying out the government's new agenda, and the 2009 budget to follow soon thereafter. Votes supporting the Throne Speech and the budget will, by definition, be votes of confidence. He admitted that some "trust-building" was necessary within the House of Commons, and called upon the opposition to "work together in the interests of Canada," and welcomed their suggestions for the budget in particular.

¶2. (SBU) In his first-ever speech to the nation on December 3 (reftel), PM Harper had not specified what course he would recommend to the Governor General, warning only against a proposed coalition between the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party, supported by the Bloc Quebecois, claiming that "the opposition is attempting to impose this deal without your say, without your consent, and without your vote." He pledged that his government would "use every legal means at our disposal to protect our democracy, to protect our economy, and to protect Canada." In his response, Leader of the Official Opposition Liberal Party Stephane Dion insisted that the Conservative Party had "lost the confidence of a majority of Members of Parliament," and therefore had "lost the right to govern." He pledged that the proposed coalition would govern by consensus, goodwill, and cooperation, "reflecting "Canadian values."

¶3. (C) Comment: With the prorogation of Parliament, the Conservatives have side-stepped a confidence vote on an opposition motion scheduled for the week of December 8, which they would have lost. PM Harper is betting that the seven week break will staunch any momentum in the opposition parties' recent cohesion and their willingness to form an alternative coalition government, and that the opposition parties may be reluctant to vote down a formal budget in uncertain economic times. However, with only 143 seats in the 308-seat House of Commons, the Conservatives remain vulnerable to losing future confidence votes, so the chances of an election sometime in 2009 remain high.

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